

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5173

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USDOC WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRN, BEXP, GB

SUBJ: TRANSGABON RAILROAD: TAMS VISIT TO LIBREVILLE

ABIDJAN FOR WARCDO

YAOUNDE FOR RDO

USDOC FOR STEPHEN CONGER

DEPT PLEASE PASS EXIM FOR MALLOY

REF: (A) LIBREVILLE 0067 (NOTAL); (B) STATE 000266 (NOTAL);
(C) STATE 015549 (NOTAL)

1. TAMS REP HEINS ACCOMPANIED BY FRENCH PARTNERS
DEMONTESSUS (BCEOM) AND OBELIN (SOFRERAIL) ARRIVED
LIBREVILLE JANUARY 28.

2. WHEN HEINS CALLED AT EMBASSY I TOLD HIM I HAD OBTAINED
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APPOINTMENT WITH FINMIN MOUKAMBI WHO (AS RESULT MY

LETTER TO PRESIDENT BONGO) HAD BEEN GIVEN GREEN LIGHT TO CONCLUDE AGREEMENT WITH TAMS AND PARTNERS. I STRONGLY ADVISED AGAINST ANY CONTACT WITH VION UNTIL GROUP HAD RECEIVED CONTRACT APPROVAL DIRECTLY FROM MINISTER AND IF POSSIBLE PRESIDENT HIMSELF.

3. HEINS CALLED ON MOUKAMBI WITH ME MORNING JANUARY 29 AND MOUKAMBI WAS VERY FRIENDLY AND ASSURED US THERE NO PROBLEM AND HE WOULD TAKE STEPS TO PROCEED RAPIDLY WITH MATTER AND EVEN TRY TO SET UP APPOINTMENT FOR GROUP WITH PRESIDENT. MOUKAMBI CONFIRMED THAT HE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED BY BONGO TO SEND ME A LETTER, IN REPLY TO MINE, CONFIRMING THAT GOG AGREED TO SIGN ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS CONTRACT WITH TAMS AND PARTNERS AND THAT I WOULD RECEIVE IT IN A FEW DAYS. MOUKAMBI SAID HE WOULD WISH TO MEET ALSO WITH FRENCH PARTNERS.

4. FRENCH PARTNERS HOWEVER HAD DECLINED TO CALL ON MOUKAMBI AT TIME SET FOR APPOINTMENT ON GROUNDS THEY HAD PRIOR MEETING WITH VION. FRENCH MET AT LENGTH WITH VION TO DISCUSS TECHNICAL DETAILS AND UNDER FALSE

WPRESSION VION WAS MAN TO MAKE DECISION. THEY FOUND VION TOTALLY OPPOSED TO CONCEPT OF HIRING ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM (HE CONVINCED AN EXPANDED OCTRA UNDER HIS DIRECTION CAN PERFORM TASK) AND DISCUSSIONS CENTERED ON COST OF SERVICES SUCH FIRM (OR CONSORTIUM).

5. LATE AFTERNOON JANUARY 30 HEINS AND FRENCH PARTNERS WERE ABLE TO SEE MOUKAMBI FOR A FEW MINUTES AND FOUND HIM ABRUPT AND MUCH LESS FORTHCOMING THAN PREVIOUS DAY, STATING MERELY MATTER UNDER STUDY. HEINS AND PARTNERS WERE QUITE DISCOURAGED AND REALIZED VION HAD CLEARLY BEEN IN TOUCH WITH MOUKAMBI BETWEEN MEETINGS MORNING JANUARY 29 AND AFTERNOON JANUARY 30 AND HAD ARGUED STRONGLY AGAINST PROPOSAL USING COST VUGURES OBTAINED FROM FRENCH PARTNERS ON JANUARY 29.

6. FRENCH AMBASSADOR (AT REQUEST FRENCH FIRMS) RAISED MATTER WITH PRESIDENT BONGO MORNING JANUARY 31 AND WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TOLD CURTLY BY PRESIDENT THAT HE THOROUGHLY FAMILIAR WITH PROBLEM, THAT DECISION WOULD BE TAKEN BY GOG IN TWO OR THREE WEEKS AND THAT GROUP SHOULD MEANWHILE SEE MOUKAMBI, FONMIN RAWIRI AND PUBLIC WORKS MINISTER MALEKOU.

7. GROUP WAS ABLE TO SEE RAWIRI AND MALEKOU AFTERNOON JANUARY 31 AND BOTH MINISTERS WERE VERY POSITIVE AND ENCOURAGING AND RAWIRI DECTATED LETTER ON SPOT TO

PRESIDENT URGING POSITIVE ACTION. BOTH MINISTERS DID, HOWEVER, INSIST ON GROUP BRINGING IN ITALIAN PARTNER (REF A) AND GOUNG SUGGESTED ELECTROCONSUL WITH WHICH THEY APPARENTLY HAD HAD SOME CONTACTS (AND WHICH IS ALSO FIRM WHICH ITALIAN AMBASSADOR CURRENTLY PUSHING). SOFRERAIL MENTIONED AS "CHEF DE FIL" ALTHOUGH HEINS TOLD ME TAMS MAY BE CHOSEN AS "LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE."

8. HEINS AND FRENCH PARTNERS DRAFTED MINOR AGREEMENT WITH VION FOR GOUNG TO HELP REVIEW BIDS AND GROUP LEFT GABON FEBRUARY 1 QUITE ENCOURAGED IN THINKING THAT ULTIMATE GOG DECISION ON OVERALL CONTRACT WOULD BE FAVORABLE. THEY FELT RAWIRI AND MALEKOU'S POSITIVE REACTION REPRESENTED LATER DEVELOPMENT WHICH OVERTOOK LUKEWARM ATTITUDE OF MOUKAMBI AND PRESIDENT.

9. COMMENT: I HOPE GROUP'S OPTIMISM IS JUSTIFIED, ALTHOUGH POSSIBILITY ALSO EXISTS THAT RAWIRI AND MALEKOU MERELY REFLECTING EARLIER POSITIVE ATTITUDE OF BONGO BEFORE VION GOT TO MOUKAMBI AND MOUKAMBI RELAYED VION'S MISGIVINGS TO BONGO. SEEMS EVIDENT THAT TAMS FRENCH PARTNERS MADE GRAVE TACTICAL ERROR IN FIRST CONTACTING VION AND GIVING HIM AMMUNITION HE NEEDED TO TRY TO SABOTAGE DEAL THEREBY JEOPARDIZING AN AGREEMENT FOR WHICH BONGO HAD EARLIER GIVEN GREEN LIGHT IN HIS TALKS WITH HIS MINISTERS. IN ANY EVENT I SHALL CONTINUE TO TRY TO PUSH DISCREETLY FOR FAVORABLE DECISION BY GOG. MCKESSON

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